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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE LONG EVOLUTION OF EXTREME RIGHT MUSIC IN ITALY AND GERMANY**Giorgia Bulli***University of Florence*

ABSTRACT: The importance of music in extreme right political culture is acknowledged in recent academic and non-academic contributions in Italy and Germany. Patterns of music development in different European contexts reflect the prevailing ideological dimension of the role of this cultural expression in the extreme right context (Dyck 2016). Labels such as “White power music”, “Rechtsrock” and “Reichsrock” all point to various trajectories in the recruitment and socialization functions of extreme right music. In Italy, the concept of “rock identitario” designates the most successful form of music production by well-known bands directly linked to political movements. However, identitarian rock is only the arrival point of a long tradition of music development within the Italian Extreme Right. In Germany, recent investigations of the “Rechtsrock” phenomenon have highlighted the intense internationalization of networks of extreme right movements that mostly mobilize cultural manifestations of extreme right ideologies. The analysis comprises a diachronic enquiry into the development of extreme right music in Germany and Italy. From a comparative perspective, the paper will highlight how – no different from other political languages – changes in music production both reflect and go along with the transformation of the Italian and German Extreme Right from an organizational, political culture and strategic perspective¹.

KEYWORDS: Extreme Right, Germany, Italy, Music, Subculture

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, comparative analysis of the evolution of the extreme right in Europe has focused on the political and electoral aspects of the extreme right's resurgence (Ignazi 2003, Rydgren 2005, Arzheimer and Carter 2006, Arzheimer 2018) in different West European countries. Extreme right parties and extreme right movements have been the main objects of comparative enquiries that highlight the parties' ideologies and electoral performances on the one side, and modifications to the movements' mobilization on the other. However, scant attention has been paid to the cultural aspects of the extreme right's evolution in a comparative approach. Cultural products like music, art and films have been relegated "to a secondary status analytically compared to more tangible social and political movement productions like protest, political turnout or media coverage" (Corte and Edwards 2008, 5).

This theoretical and empirical gap has recently been acknowledged by seminal studies that investigate the role of youth cultures in the transformation of the prevailing symbolic and recruitment tools adopted by extreme right movements in Europe (Miller Idriss 2018). Among these, dress codes, aesthetic elements of belonging such as tattoos, piercings etc., lifestyle remodelling (Kølvraa, C. and Forchtner 2019) and the use of cultural and consumer products (Forchtner and Tominc 2017) all point to a phenomenon of the commercialisation and mainstreaming of the extreme right in Europe (Miller Idriss, 2017). These recent studies highlight the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of extreme right evolution. As shown by Miller Idriss (2009) and Schedler (2014 and 2016), a perspective of enquiry that combines a sociological understanding of extreme right activism (Klandermans and Mayer 2006) with a culture-based analysis of the symbolic, ideological and material incentives offered by these groups to sympathizers and affiliated members can better explain the persistence of traditional organizations of the extreme right and the emergence of new modalities of extreme right aggregations. This interdisciplinary approach does not dismiss the political-science contribution to the analysis of the extreme right. On the contrary, it offers an innovative environment of theoretical and empirical discussion where typical variables like electoral success, organization structure and interactions with internal and external stakeholders are no longer the *explanandum*, but rather elements of a broader understanding of extreme right mobilization, where culture and symbols play a comparable role to political roles and voters' decisions. Within this new theoretical and empirical approach, significant gaps still exist. A first methodological lacuna is the limited adoption of a genuine comparative perspective in studies of the cultural aspects of extreme right mobilization.

The study of extreme right music – better known, depending on the context, as Nazi-Rock (Funk-Hennigs 1995, Brown 2004), Rechts-Rock (Dornbuschh and Raabe 2002) Reichsrock (Dyck 2016) and White Power Music (Corte and Edwards 2008, Langebach and Raabe 2013) – is not a new topic within studies of the extreme right. As the paper will highlight, music has always played an important role within the extreme right milieu for recruitment and socialization purposes. Moreover, being a crucial component for the formation of collective identities, music has also been particularly important in circumstances of crucial restructuring of extreme right subcultures in Germany and Italy. However, with a few exceptions (Brown 2004), little attention has been devoted to the comparative analysis of this political and cultural form of identity formation, recruitment and subcultural organization. The present article aims to fill this gap by presenting a comparative analysis of the evolution of extreme right music in two countries: Germany and Italy. The paper will highlight how – no different from other political languages – changes in music production and consumption both reflect and go along with the transformation of the Italian and German Extreme Right from an organizational, political culture and strategic perspective.

The methodological reasons for the selection of these two cases depend on historical/ cultural and political/ institutional aspects. From a historical point of view, Germany and Italy represent fertile ground for testing the impact of different patterns of evolution of the respective party systems after the Second World War, with particular attention paid to the reorganization of the extreme right. Comparing Germany and Italy will shed light on the influence of the different institutional and constitutional settings adopted by two new democracies in the reshaping of the extreme right in its organization and cultural aspects. The adoption in Germany of a constitutional setting based on the principle of *Streitbare Demokratie* (Militant Democracy) (Backes and Jaschke, 1990) permitted banning extreme right parties and extreme left parties, respectively, in 1952 and 1956. In contrast, the early founding of an extreme right party in the post-war scenario and its immediate inclusion in the Italian party system created a completely different background to the evolution of the extreme right, from both political and cultural points of view.

A comparison of the constitutional settings of the two countries as a background to the development of organized extreme right music in Germany and Italy after the Second World War rests on a case selection that highlights the striking differences between the two cases in the early phase of extreme music production (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). However, the individuation of evolution stages of the extreme right music scenarios in these two countries over time will also permit illustrating converging aspects of the two countries. Despite deep differences in the role played by the orga-

nized extreme right in the two parties' systems, similarities will emerge as a consequence of the aforementioned combination of sociological and cultural aspects responsible for the evolution of extreme right music in both countries.

The article is divided into three parts. In the first part (paragraphs 2 and 3), the theoretical framework will be described as comprising different bodies of literature that help to understand the functions of music in the process of identity-shaping, community creation and influence on extreme right political subcultures. Consequently, particular attention will be paid to the definition of the phenomenon of extreme right rock. In this context, the role played by the concept of "youth culture" will emerge as an indispensable point of reference in order to correctly locate extreme right music in its political environment. In the second part (paragraphs 4, 5 and 6), the evolutionary stages of extreme right music will be divided into three main historical phases. These three waves evidence the influence of political variables on the evolution stages of extreme right music in Germany and Italy, but also highlight the role played by its main actors – music bands, cultural/ economic entrepreneurs, fans – and their respective cultural and economic incentives. The third part (Conclusion) will offer an overarching assessment of the interplay of political, cultural and social elements in the evolution of extreme right music in Germany and Italy.

2. Theoretical framework: music, emotions, mobilization

A comparative study of the evolution of extreme right music highlights the necessity to combine different theoretical approaches reflecting the complexity of the interplay amongst cultural, social and political variables.

A first approach evidences the role played by music in the construction, perpetuation and modification of collective identities (Eyerman 2002) and their cultural self-perception. A second approach focuses on the functions of integration and symbolic representation (Clayton, Herbert and Middleton 2013) of music, as the background to the creation of new communities. A third approach acknowledges the role of emotions in politics, emphasizing the affective strategies adopted by political organizations in the mobilization of voters and sympathizers.

Following the first approach, Eyerman and Jaminson underlined early on the scant attention paid by the social movement and sociological literature to "musical components of collective identity" (1998, 7). This lacuna was particularly serious when considering that the production and consumption of music is a collective action and that its rites and rituals are a constitutive part of the musical *mise-en-scène*, which is a cul-

tural and political act (Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk 2006, Meyer 2000, 51). In “informing our sense of place” (Stokes 1994, 3), musical events “evoke and organize collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity”. More recent contributions have partially filled this gap (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008, 1199) by underlining the sense of belonging stimulated by music.

The second theoretical approach emphasizes the role of music in the creation of new communities kept together by cultural and social linkages (Clayton, Herbert and Middleton 2013). It is particularly in the area of subcultural studies that music has found proper acknowledgment as a constitutive element of the complex process of identity formation. Within this area of study, musicologists and ethnomusicologists have emphasized the particular capacity of music to intercept and shape moments of social crisis and identity formation. Frith (1978, 51) recognizes the function of rupture to pre-existing schemes that music – like other forms of cultural production – is able to perform. Particularly starting in the 1990s, the direct or indirect impact of music on social categories such as class, gender, ethnicity subcultures and counterculture mobilization has been interpreted within a broader influence of music in the process of community formation. Far from being just a soundtrack, music plays a crucial role in the creation and transformation of subcultures, as well as in the production of knowledge (Titon 2003).

A third more recent theoretical approach underscores the political investment by political parties in the politics of fear and resentment. If we consider the recent extensive literature on radical right populist parties, emotions are treated as the background to a successful populist mobilization. A politics of fear (Wodak 2015), as well as the exploitation of economic and cultural anxieties (Ivarsflaten 2008) by radical right populist parties, is constantly evoked when explaining the successful political communication adopted by populist parties and leaders in the relationship with their electors and sympathizers. This approach to the use of emotions hides a more profound – and much less analyzed – function that feelings have in the construction of collective identities².

Despite some differences amongst these approaches, a common understanding of the privileged relationship between emotions and political mobilization emerges when dealing with music production and consumption. It is on the basis of this common understanding that the three bodies of literature converge in highlighting the role of mu-

² Despite the extensive terminological debate on the use of the labels “extreme right”, “far right” and “radical right” (Mudde 1996), I opted to identify parties, movements and political cultures with a clear reference to an extreme right ideology (Mudde 2000) as “extreme right”. I used the label “radical right” to refer to the right wing populist shift (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1995) and to the exploitation of popular resentment typical of radical right populist parties and movements (Wodak 2015).

sic in its cultural, social and political practices. The consumption and production of extreme right music pass through leisure activities, style affirmations and aesthetic configurations. Leisure plays an important role when taking into account the vital function of extreme right music performances (festivals, exhibitions, concerts) for aggregation and recruitment purposes (Virkow, 2007). Style refers not only to music genres, but also, and much more so, to changes to the visual aspect of participants at music performances: clothes, hair, individual and collective behaviour (Flad 2011). Recent modifications to the style (and lifestyle) of extreme right activists have been the object of documented enquiries in different countries, Germany and Italy included (Schedler 2014 and 2016; Albanese, Bulli, Castelli and Froio 2014, Schlembach 2013,). Leisure, style and aesthetics have also been taken into consideration in recent studies that highlight the hybridization of traditional right-wing and left-wing cultural practices (Kølvraa and Forchtner 2019) and the strategic cultural appropriation of traditional left practices to extreme right cultural mobilization activities (Koch 2013).

3. Extreme right music: a definable phenomenon?

Extreme right rock can be considered an umbrella concept that includes all forms of pop music at the service of political movements of the extreme right (Botsch, Raabe and Schulze 2019, 9). As underlined by Raabe (2019, 19), right wing rock is more than “music with extreme right content”. It includes music bands and music labels, distribution and business, recording houses and clothing brands, as well as the organization of national and international festivals. This multifaceted aspect of the phenomenon of extreme right music production and consumption is common to all countries taken into account by national and international enquiries into the expanding relevance of the cultural dimension of extreme right mobilization.

Defining extreme right music is no easy task (Marchi 1997, 332). The complexity of the concept interlinks with the multifaceted phenomenon of the extreme right (Mudde 2000). Enquiries into the music production of white supremacist movements in the United States show different evolution patterns if compared to the developing nature of extreme right music in European countries (Windisch and Simi 2017). In a study dedicated to the German extreme right music scene, Langebach and Raabe (2013, 249) make clear that the term *Rechtsrock* does not refer to a particular kind (in terms of genre) of music. It refers much more to “lyrics, which are based on nationalism, racism, Antisemitism or on the glorification of National/Socialism or Fascism”. Despite its high level of generality, Langebach and Raabe’s definition has the advantage of highlighting

three main elements: 1) extreme right music – independent of its country-specific definition – is not encoded within one definite music genre (Brown 2004, 157); 2) the content of extreme right lyrics reproduces the multifaceted ideological variations of extreme right ideology; 3) extreme right music directly or indirectly always makes reference to a fascist past.

Most authors agree as regards identifying the origins of extreme right music being in the late 1970s, when the fusion of racist lyrics and punk rock was promoted by Ian Stuart Donaldson, the singer and leader of the band *Skrewdriver*. Ian Stuart Donaldson is still seen as a heroic figure in the extreme right cultural environment. The leader of *Skrewdriver* is celebrated as the “architect” of a network of musicians sharing a common platform for the organization of activities and the production of extreme right music (Marchi 1997, 333). The cultural and political activities of *Skrewdriver* soon led to the creation of an influential network – *Blood & Honour* (founded in 1987) – which rapidly extended its influence at the international level as one of the first and most successful neo-Nazi promotion services. Initially founded as an association for music activities and as a publication for facilitating the networking of extreme right members and sympathizers, B&H soon revealed its more ambitious political aims. This combination of cultural, political and economic incentives to commitment in the extreme right milieu soon proved very successful.

The activities of B&H continued after the death of Ian Stuart Donaldson, facilitated by the opportunities offered by technological innovations and the increasingly evident digitization of extreme right activities online (Caiani and Parenti 2013). Research on the early development of extreme right music also emphasizes the oppositional nature of the new phenomenon. The birth of extreme right rock happened within the skinhead culture, which started developing in working class areas of England in the late 1960s (Pollard, 2016), without any precise political connotations. The original “rebel” character of the initial skinhead movement was reinterpreted by the *Skrewdriver* experience to move in the direction of a nationalistic and racist turn that openly celebrated National Socialism. As soon as cultural entrepreneurs like Ian Stuart Donaldson proved the existence of a political terrain of action for the new extreme right skinhead culture, the music scene was enriched with the creation of political/ cultural organizations. One of the most influential of these was “Rock against communism” (RAC). RAC directly opposed the “Rock against Racism” movement that had been developing within the skinhead original subculture since the late 1970s as a reaction to racist developments in its music scene (Funk Hennigs 1986). RAC included the organization of extreme right music festivals and networking activities for its members. The immediate success of concerts organized under the RAC label showed the existence of a fertile terrain for the

transformation of extreme right music into an economic business. The combination of cultural, political and economic incentives that emerged in the skinhead scene soon spread to other countries. With the help of the B&H platform, Ian Stuart Donaldson was able to establish contacts with other European countries. In particular, cooperation with the German label Rock O-Rama was crucial for the internationalization of the extreme right music scene and was the basis of its development into a profitable business (Flad 2006, 106). Since the early evolution described so far, extreme right music has become an institutionalized reality. As stated by Shekhovtsov (2013 291), “far right messages are even more explicit and unvarnished than those of more or less organized socio-political extreme-right groups”.

The next paragraphs will try to evaluate whether Shekhovtsov’s quote can be applied to the Italian and German extreme right music scenarios. The analysis will highlight the influence played *by* music within extreme right subcultures in Germany and Italy on one side, and the political investment *in* music by social and political entrepreneurs for socialization and recruitment purposes on the other. The diachronic reconstruction of the developments in the two countries will mainly rely on an investigation of the political variables that help to explain the role of extreme right parties and extreme right organizations over time in Germany and Italy. This analytical division is different from the common partition into decades usually adopted in the German (Flad 2002) and Italian (Marchi 1997, Di Giorgi 2008) literature on extreme right music. One methodological remark regarding secondary sources for the analysis of Italian music production is also necessary. While, in Germany, studies on extreme right music are an important part of the rich sociological and political literature on the German extreme right, in Italy, only a few scientific analyses – despite their political orientation (Marchi 1997) – focus on the rich Italian extreme right musical production. Most sources (Di Giorgi 2008, Di Giorgi and Ferrario 2010, Di Tullio, 2005) are enquiries and historical reconstructions conducted by insiders of the extreme right cultural and political scene.

4. The first wave (early 1970s – late 1980s)

As evidenced in the theoretical framework, extreme right music development is intrinsically linked with the structure of party systems, as well as with the emergence of new and oppositional subcultures. The first evidence of extreme right mobilization in the field of extreme right music in Europe started to appear in the 1970s, almost immediately after the 1968 movement. The most striking differences in the evolution of extreme right music between Germany and Italy are visible in the 1970s. In that period,

in Germany, the overwhelming visibility of the extreme left during the 1968 contestations went along with the subsequent process of electoral decline of the extreme right at the party level. In 1969, the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) enjoyed unprecedented success in parliamentary elections. With 4.6 per cent of the vote, the party had come close to the 5 per cent threshold that would have allowed the party to be represented in the Bundestag. After the banning of the extreme right party SRP (Socialist Reich Party) in 1952, the integration by mainstream parties of the issues presented by the NPD hampered the revitalization of the extreme right scene for at least a decade (Zimmermann 2003). In this context, the 1970s were marked in Germany by the hegemony of traditional parties. The residual space for the extreme-right subculture that had been developing until the banning of the SRP and which had started to re-emerge in tandem with the first signs of economic downturn and the initial investment in the issue of immigration, rapidly extinguished in both institutional and cultural terms. However, despite these unfavourable conditions, at the end of the 1970s the NPD seemed to recognize that a cultural revitalization could play a crucial role in the socialization of younger cohorts of sympathizers that had remained until that moment on the margins of NPD life (Farin and Flad 2011). It is in this context that the NPD made attempts to attract the attention of the potential segment of youth militants through the sponsorship of music bands like *Ragnaröck*, who started performing at the end of 1977. However, this cultural investment remained isolated and was soon bypassed by the skinhead cultural experience that would emerge in the following decade. In fact, the beginning of the 1980s was marked by the developing skinhead culture (Weiss, 2000 65). At the moment of its penetration into the German cultural (and only later political) scene, the skinhead movement had already lost the original traits that had marked its first development in Great Britain (Farin and Flad 2011, 12). The difference between the original skinheads and those that mobilized the cultural scene in Germany was also evident in the music they listened to: punk (Oi!) instead of Ska and Reggae; white music instead of the music of the Jamaican immigrants who had influenced the birth of the Skinhead culture in Great Britain in the late 1960s. Driven by their passion for football, leisure and music, German skinheads initially met in stadiums and pubs and at concerts (Funk Hennigs 1995, 88). The first skinhead groups listened to English skinhead music or the first German punk rock, whose main content dealt with everyday frustrations, rising unemployment, the rejection of bourgeois society and hatred of the police and other institutions (Dornbusch-Raabe 2002, 26). Despite the fact that German punk at the beginning of the 1980s had a leftist orientation, developments on the right soon emerged. Bands like the well-known *Böhse Onkelz* formed and influenced the extreme right music scene with explicit xenophobic content until their official

abandoning of the extreme right environment in the late 1980s. *Böhse Onkelz's* refusal to be officially associated with the NPD or other extreme right parties reflected the reluctance of punk and skin bands to be associated with the extreme right at the party level. The lyrics of the songs also reflected their cultural and political distrust in the organized extreme right (Flad 2002). At the beginning of the 1980s, skinhead culture also made its way in the GDR through informal groups (Dornbusch and Raabe 2007, 10) which tried to escape State repression through low aesthetisation, but high levels of group discipline (Dornbusch and Raabe 2002, 32). Despite the organizational difficulties due to State repression in the GDR, it is important to outline the persistence of this subcultural scene and its part in the developments that would happen after the crucial events of reunification.

The 1970s and '80s in Italy were marked by a completely different situation. It is possible to summarize these distinctions into three main phenomena: the first one is the influence of the extreme right party MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano) on the cultural developments of the extreme right; the second one is the attempt of the MSI to strictly control the cultural manifestations of its youth sector; the third one deals with the content of the lyrics and their political and symbolic meaning. The dominant role of the MSI in the history of Italian neo-Fascism determined not only the mechanics of the Italian party system. It also influenced the cultural environment of the extreme right, particularly concerning the role of younger cohorts of members and sympathizers. Since the first years of the MSI, younger Italian neo-fascists were very active not only within the organization, but also on the cultural level (Baldoni 2009, 43). However, the broad autonomy left to the youth organization in the party statute only rarely translated into an autonomy of action. The feeling of ghettoization and auto-ghettoization (Germinario 1999, 71) of the political culture of the extreme right after the end of the Second World War affected the younger generation differently when compared to the nostalgic feelings of the older generation. Both sentiments were reflected in the extreme right music scene that started to develop in the 1970s. The late 1960s were characterized by the willingness of young members of the extreme right not to leave the phenomenon of the 1968 protests to the left (Mammone 2008, 214). During the well-known events of Valle Giulia (Panvini, 2009, 30-34), the party cadre of the MSI repudiated the activism of extreme right university students. The events of 1968 determined a deep fracture between younger militants and party leaders that characterized the later developments of the extreme right cultural scene. The dramatic events of the 1970s – marked by the radicalization of political activities and growing political violence – went along with a double process within younger cohorts of the Italian extreme right. Next to the passage to extra-parliamentary (and often violent) activities of extreme

right militants, inside the MSI the cultural revolution of the Nouvelle Droite started to gain in importance. The deep rethinking of the origins of the extreme right and of Neo-fascism were accompanied by an unprecedented emphasis on new issues, including environmentalism, the role of women in society and the very understanding of the concept of “community” (Tarchi 2010). These tendencies were expressed in publications like “La Voce della fogna” (*The voice of the sewer*), founded in 1974, where a regular “pop” column described and commented on the rock production of the 1960s and ’70s (Marchi 1997, 45-58). The cultural revolution of the ND went hand in hand with requests for new forms of expression, in which music played a major role. The setting where the new issues promoted by the ND were discussed within an innovative political and cultural framework was the Hobbit Camps. The Hobbit Camps (1977, 1978 and 1980) were cultural festivals organized by younger MSI members who intended to promote a metapolitical understanding of the ND. Hosted in a rural environment, the festivals organized public debates on issues promoted by the ND. Music bands that would mark the beginnings of the so-called “musica alternativa” (alternative music) (Di Giorgi and Ferrario, 2010 37) not only animated the activities of the Hobbit Camps, but also testified to the new general cultural expression that extreme right youth aimed to achieve. The announcement of the first Hobbit camp in “Voce della Fogna” made clear how music represented a constitutive element of cultural events (Tarchi 2010).

According to Di Giorgi and Ferrario (2010, 37), elements common to alternative music were the internal coherence of the contents of songs, their non-commercial character, and their duration over time. Music bands such as *La Compagnia dell’Anello* (*The Company of the Ring*, a clear reference to the Tolkien saga), *Amici del Vento* belonging to the folk genre, *Janus* – representing the forerunner of the new rock penetration of the extreme right scene that would develop in the 1980s and ’90s – and songwriters such as Massimo Morsello started to perform on the occasions of the Hobbit Camps. They described the “rage of those years, the ideal roots, the feelings, the problems and emotions of everyday life ... no longer the songs of the Ventennio, but something new and understandable to the contemporary era” (ibid.). Regarding the issues contained in the lyrics, direct references to fascist and Nazi regimes were sporadic. Myths of the “fatherland, the *Blut und Boden*, elitism, the betrayals of the masses and the “few but pure”” (Marchi 1997, 61) were instead represented.

Different from the German context, the evolution of extreme right music in Italy was not primarily affected by cultural phenomena such as the irruption of new cultural lifestyles, like that of the skinheads into the cultural “status quo”. On the contrary, the influence of the political doctrine of the ND was facilitated by the existence of an organized extreme right political and party scene. Italy, where pre-existing attempts to lib-

erate extreme right music from the nostalgia of the Fascist regime had already occurred, was only partially and later influenced by the birth of the Rock Against Communism circuit that offered the possibility of internationalization in many other European countries. Some evolution towards the Oi! and punk genres took place during the 1980s, when groups like *Intolleranza (Intolerance)*, *Rommel Skins* and *Settimo Sigillo (Seventh Seal)* got closer to the extreme right bands circulating in Europe, not only from the point of view of the music genre, but also with regard to the issues contained in the lyrics. The prevailing climate of political retreat following the 1970s, characterized by the escalation of political violence, is reflected in some of the lyrics of the bands of the late 1980s. During the 1980s, despite the rising quality of extreme right music production, the circulation of alternative music decreased. The free radio stations (Di Giorgi Ferrario 2010, 44), self-managed broadcasters that started to be founded in different Italian cities for the exchange of ideas, cassettes and innovative cultural projects, were closed down during the 1980s, as well as cultural fanzines that had always been looked at with suspicion by the MSI.

The first wave of expansion of extreme right music evidences the greater influence of cultural developments in Germany, when compared to the Italian situation. In Italy, the effects of the early developments of the organized extreme right were reflected both in the attempt of the MSI to control the cultural expression of the younger cohorts of party members and in the cultural rebellion of the extreme right militants who had not been socialized during the fascist regime. The Italian extreme right music scene has been marked for two decades by these tensions that coexisted with a musical production influenced by nostalgic content typical of a political subculture perceiving itself as constrained in a ghetto.

5. The second wave (1990s to 2000s)

While the first wave is characterized by deep differences between the German and Italian contexts, the early 1990s show growing similarities in the evolution of the extreme right music scenes in the two countries. This realignment was determined by political events that profoundly influenced the German and Italian contexts. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the process of reunification created an opportunity for the evolution of the German extreme right in its organization at the party level and in further structuring of the cultural and music scene. At the party level, the domination of the extreme right by the NPD was challenged by parties founded in the late 1980s and early '90s (die Republikaner, Deutsche Volks-Union), which started to mobilize on issues

typical of other radical right populist parties in Europe. Migration and law and order were the main themes of a new form of radicalization, which soon transferred from the political level to the society. The same issues started to be represented in the extreme right music scene, albeit in a different frame and autonomously via the evolution of the party-based extreme right. The fall of the Berlin Wall also had major effects on extreme right music for another reason: it created opportunities for Eastern and Western political and cultural subcultures to meet, with the consequent opening up of a much broader market for the extreme right music scene. In the uncertain conditions following the November 1989 events, the State organs of the GDR no longer monitored the extreme right subcultural scene, which consequently profited from the free space left to it to establish contacts with its Western counterparts. On the eve of 1990, about 20 extreme right music bands existed in Germany, and about the same number of specialized fanzines organized around national and international platforms such as Rock O' Rama. In the early 1990s the number of bands had grown, and the numbers of albums and concerts doubled from 1995 to 1996 (Dornbusch and Raabe 2002, 36). The consistency of this growth must not be seen only in terms of numbers. The intensification of violence and the transformation in the lyrics of extreme right bands centred more and more on recurrent images of an enemy (Farin and Flad 2011), provoking increasing hostility towards migrants, which was reflected in xenophobic attacks in Hoyerswerda in 1991 and Rostock in 1992. The neo-Nazi firebomb attack in Mölln (1992) – where three Turkish citizens were killed – was a turning point in this escalation of violence. In the following years, at least 12 extreme right groups were banned and more than 90 labels and publications indexed (Farin and Flad 2011). In this context of legal repression, youth organizations – among them music bands – took on a growing role in the propagation of extreme right political culture. The resistance to censorship was expressed on the one side through the lyrics of the bands, on the other through the organization of the market that pushed sympathizers to buy albums before they were indexed. However, as reported by Dyck (2016, 44), albums that appeared on the lists of banned bands became more desirable than others. The traditional parties vainly tried to reorganize their youth organizations – like the NPD did with the Junge Nationaldemokraten (JN). However, neo-Nazi skin bands were able to more efficiently control the socialization of young extreme right sympathizers, particularly in the Eastern regions. The international network of B&H was of great help in the management of this growing informal organization of the extreme right. The extreme right music landscape expanded its frontiers in terms of genres and lifestyle. Regarding the first aspect, numerous bands were founded, rapidly reaching high levels of notoriety: after *Böhse Onkelz*, the most famous bands of the 1990s – *Landser*, *Noie Werte*, *Storkraft* – evidenced the ex-

istence of rich and fragmented extreme right music that varied in terms of genres and issues. Flad (2002) divides the content of band lyrics into “love” and “hate” references. Germany, the German flag, alcohol, Rudolf Hess, Ian Stuart Donaldson, the Wikings and the Northern divinities belonged to the first group, while migrants, Jews, political opponents and the police belonged to the second.

In Italy, the passage from the First to the Second Republic in the 1990s brought about the transformation (1995) of the MSI into Alleanza Nazionale (AN), and subsequent fragmentation of the organized extreme right (Tarchi 1997). The development of the extreme right signified the end of Italian neo-fascism under the sign of the MSI and opened up a new political era. In particular, at the Congress of Fiuggi, MSI party delegates decided to give birth to Alleanza Nazionale. The decision was not agreed by all delegates and several subsequent scissions occurred. In 1997, the party Forza Nuova was created from a scission of Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore, one of the main fractions that had not followed the creation of Alleanza Nazionale. The founders were Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello (Rao 2006). The biographies of Fiore and Morsello evidence the linkage between political and cultural developments on the Italian extreme right. Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello were among the founders of Terza Posizione, a extreme right organization established in Rome in 1978. In 1980, after the Bologna massacre of 2 August, they fled to Germany and later reached Great Britain, where they set up a business and lived without interruption for nearly 20 years (Baldoni 2009, 251). At the moment of his escape, Morsello had already started to perform and register music. He had played on the occasion of Hobbit Camp 2, and during his years of the exile he produced some of the most influential extreme right songs. The songs written and released by Morsello during his years spent in London count as a perfect example of the typical content of Italian alternative music: political commitment, the reflections of a generation socialized in an era of political fight, violence and radicalization. Next to this ideological continuity, during the 1990s, a new political era of extreme right music started to develop. Beside the traditional sounds of “musica alternativa”, the growing influence of Ska-punk and Oi! was expressed not only in musical transformations, but also in the creation of new organizational structures. The group Veneto Fronte Skinhead was founded in 1986 and the following year took charge of *Blood & Honour* Italy (Dyck 2016, 74). Many other smaller organizations were founded in this period. In terms of bands and magazines being founded, concert organization and label structuring, the early 1990s was a period when Italy reached a stage of development in its extreme right music scene comparable with other European countries (Marchi 1997, 211). Compared to the German situation, in Italy the effect of state repression was much more limited. The police repression operation known as

“Operazione Runa” was carried out in 1993 to apply the Mancino Law and resulted in the arrest of 66 militants from various groups and the closure of dozens of sections of extreme right groups (Bull 2005, 262, Marchi 1997, 230-231). However, different from Germany, state repression did not affect the music scene. On the contrary, as stated by Marchi (1997), the activities of the national revolutionary right would spread in the following decade precisely via the music scene. Organizational developments also occurred at the organizational-economic level: three main Italian labels promoting and producing extreme right music were founded during the 1990s: *Tuono Records* was established in 1993 in the area of the Veneto Fronte Skinhead; *Rupe Tarpea* operated around Rome and published the newsletter “Nonconforme”; and the label *Assalto Sonoro* was based in Milan and acted as the operations base for the *Hammerskin* network. Finally, the cultural association *Lorien* was founded in 1997 as the historical archives of Italian alternative music with political support from Mirko Tremaglia, an influential representative of the former MSI who joined the Alleanza Nazionale in 1995. The website of the association is an important source of information about the variety of extreme right music production in Italy and the intensity of concert organization. By analyzing the production of the most influential labels, it is possible to identify the evolution of the music genres of the extreme right music scene in Italy. While *Lorien* produces most of the traditional alternative music (*Compagnia dell’Anello*, *Amici del Vento*), *Tuono Records* produces bands like *Gesta Bellica*, *Legittima Offesa*, *Peggior Amico* and *ADL 122* (named after the 122/1993 Mancino Law) that belong to the Rock Against Communism skin tradition. *Rupe Tarpea* produces *Intolleranza*, *Delenda Carthago*, *Skoll* and *ZetaZero Alfa*, which belong to the “Rock identitario” genre that started to develop at the beginning of the 2000s.

6. Current developments

As analyzed in the previous two sections, the first wave evidences an evolution pattern that differentiates the German and Italian contexts from many different perspectives, including the role of the party-based extreme right, the development of youth subcultures and the prevailing national or international influence on the extreme right music scene. All these differences were reflected in the lyrics of the bands, but mainly centred on issues of skin subculture in Germany and the experiences of extreme right youth political engagement in Italy. The second wave presents a certain homogenization of the two scenes, facilitated by the growing influence of skin culture in Italy which saw a reduction in party influence, differentiation in the music genres adopted, and the

growing influence of lyrics that started to abandon the issues of political engagement of the 1970s and '80s in favour of a realignment with German and international "standards" that primarily focused on the rejection of immigration, xenophobia, deep anti-institutional stances and populism (Marchi 1997, 202-203).

This homogenization trend has reached its apex in the current phase. Despite relevant differences between Germany and Italy that will be highlighted below, three main phenomena help to explain the reduction in differences between the two contexts: 1) a definitive detachment from the influence of the party-based extreme right; 2) the growing relevance of a lifestyle that presents elements of hybridization to include left wing political cultures; 3) the further internationalization of the extreme right music scene facilitated on the one side by the developing of digital networks on the Internet and social media and on the other by face-to-face socialization during concerts.

In Germany, these three dimensions are developing simultaneously, although the detachment from party organizations is not a novelty. Data presented in the 2018 Verfassungsschutz Bericht (BMI 2018) – a yearly monitoring report from the Interior Ministry on menaces to the German democratic order – show an increasing mobilization of the extreme right in its musical landscape. The report monitored the activities of 95 extreme right bands, the organization of 60 big concerts, and other contextual activities in the field of extreme right music. The biggest international events normally take place in the Eastern *Länder* of Saxony and Thuringia, which are also strongholds of the radical right populist party the AfD (Alternative for Germany), and these are attended by numerous participants, ranging from 800 to 1,300 (BMI 2018, 64). Activities carried out during these festivals are not limited to concerts. Political speeches by the organized extreme right – as in the case of the Ostritz (in Saxony) festival – evidence the interest of political parties (in this case the NPD) in the cultural coverage of the extreme right political offer. Other events, like the well-known festival of Themar in Thuringia ("Rock für Identität") – 6,000 participants in the 2017 event, coming from Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary (BMI 2017 64) – mainly focus on music and concerts. Next to the big events, smaller happenings, like the so-called *Liederabende* (songs evenings) have become particularly popular in recent years (Raabe 2019, 34). The *Liederabende* are presented as political meetings, so as to obtain authorization under the law on free assembly. The highest emotional peaks reached during international festivals coexist with the more intimate atmosphere of these musical meetings, where the lyrics of the bands cover traditional content about the Nazi past (ibid.). The use of traditional nationalist songs following the folk music genre is typical of more circumstanced events like the PEGIDA marches, where gatherings of participants are accompanied by the singing of popular traditional chants (Bulli 2017).

Issues like veganism, protection of the environment and animal rights are instead to be found in “unexpected” music genres, such as nationalistic hard-core (Raabe 2019, 28).

The internationalization of extreme right music and its hybridization through issues that have only recently been included in the songs repertoire should not hide the development of other forms of music production that have started to achieve importance and a wider audience amongst the general public. The public and commercial success of rock bands like *Frei.Wild* –from South-Tirol but performing in German – evidences the existence of immense potential between extremism and right wing populism (Bruns, Strobl 2015). With their texts containing references to immigration, love of the Heimat, explicit allusions to the colour of the skin of members of the German football team, *Frei.Wild* seems to fill a gap between extreme right Rechtsrock and the successful nationalist “Identitätsrock” that had been left available since the abandoning of the *Böhse Onkelz* of the extreme right scene and its successful passage to the commercial stage. The band declares itself apolitical, and it denounces the media for being responsible for the distortion of its public image, all typical elements of right wing populist rhetoric.

Developments towards the growing importance of “rock identitario” are also taking place in Italy. Although monitored less, big extreme right music festivals regularly take place in Italian cities. The most important novelty of the last decade is, however, represented by new forms of political mobilization on the extreme right introduced by the political activities of CasaPound Italia (CPI), an organization that openly refers to historical fascism (Froio, Castelli Gattinara, Bulli, Albanese 2020). The founding circumstances of CPI (2008) evidence the detachment from the party-based extreme right by a group of young members of Movimento Sociale – Fiamma Tricolore, which had started to be active in the city of Rome with practices belonging to the extreme left repertoire, notably squatting in apartments. A prominent figure in this group of people, and later leader of CPI, was Gianluca Innannone, frontman of *ZetaZero Alfa*, which is currently one of the most important rock bands of the so-called “rock identitario”. The rich literature on CPI evidences the role played by music in the cultural offering of CPI, as well as its origins (Di Nunzio and Toscano 2011, Rosati 2018). Innannone himself describes the birth of CasaPound Italia as the creation of a community around the activities of a pub, the militant commitment of a group of people around it and the founding of the ZZA (Innannone quoted in Caldiron 2013, 128). In an insider’s representation of the band, the circumstances of the creation of the band evidence the linkage between politics, aesthetics and lifestyle – including a rhetoric and the practice of violence (Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2014) mentioned in the opening section of the paper. The band’s ability to gain access to a wide circuit merchandising and diffusing symbols of political opposition

and resistance granted ZZA privileged contact with youth, as testified by the growing attendance of young people at the band's concerts and subsequent recruitment to the youth organization of CPI, Blocco Studentesco. Young members of CPI describe their participation in ZZA concerts as an overwhelming passion (Albanese et al. 2014). The settings of the concerts also play a role in the recruitment ability of the band. Besides the typical stages of extreme right concerts, ZZA performed in squatting areas, like the well-known Area 19, thus reinforcing the hybridization of symbolic codes of behaviour typical of CPI (Koch 2013). On the occasion of festivals, ZZA performs with other bands of the identitarian scene. Moreover, in order to grant the greatest access to extreme right music, CPI can count on its own online radio channel, "Radio Bandiera Nera" (RBN: *Black Flag radio*), created in 2007. Like the texts of the songs, issues of political commitment accompany criticism of globalization and descriptions of everyday life on the periphery typical of the first albums. Love, goliardic activities and violence are also included in a diverse repertoire that can satisfy the ideological and "pop" needs of extreme right sympathizers.

In Germany and Italy, the third wave of extreme music development shows comparable elements. "Cultural space winning", which is a typical achievement of rock music in times of cultural change, expands in the case of extreme right music to the frontiers of the diffusion of extreme right ideological content to a growing public. The current development of extreme right music in Germany and Italy points to a popularization of extreme right music within the extreme right subculture and – even if only to a limited extent so far – beyond it, as evidenced by the case of *Frei.Wild*. Despite different evolutionary patterns in Italy and Germany, the popularization of some extreme right music goes along with the popularization of populist rhetoric, which has resulted in a profound transformation of the language adopted and a deep rethinking of symbols and practices associated with its performance.

7. Conclusion

In Europe, academic attention to music within the extreme right environment started to develop in the late 1990s. Despite this late scientific reflection, the functions of extreme right music – recruiting new members; issue-framing in the field of extreme right ideology; fundraising and building financial resources (Corte and Edwards 2008, 5) – have been displaying their effects since the late 1960s.

A comparative assessment of the extreme right music scene in Germany and Italy was conducted through a diachronic analysis of the evolution stages of extreme right

music in both countries, starting from the post-Second World War restructuring of the respective party systems. Taken one by one and evaluated in terms of their mutual correlation, the three phases display the relevance of variables related to: the *construction of collective identities*, the *symbolic representation of new communities*, and the *strategic use of emotions* by extreme right and populist radical right political entrepreneurs. In being able to influence the development of new cultural collective identities – especially in times of deep political change – extreme right music constituted both the value-background for old extreme right members and the ideological soundtrack for the political engagement of new sympathizers. The “musical incentives” to this political commitment varied over time and from country to country, mainly depending on the level of structuring of the organized extreme right.

The analysis conducted in this paper highlights three main differences between the two countries. The first element of differentiation deals with the characteristics of party systems and the political space for extreme right parties in Italy and Germany. If in Italy the MSI had constant influence on the cultural expressions of the extreme right youth sector, in Germany the banning of the extreme right party the SRP in the early 1950s was the first step in persistent institutional monitoring of extreme right organizations. The initial constitutional and party system setting played a considerable role in the first phase of evolution, determining initially unfavourable conditions for the development of “domestic” extreme right music in Germany, which – meanwhile – was developed in Italy with a combination of nostalgia for the past and cultural novelty. Here, the influence of the “internal” doctrine of the Nouvelle Droite within the extreme right milieu had a visible impact on extreme right youth and on their cultural expression – music included.

The second element of differentiation deals with the political systems’ “acceptance” of extreme right cultural manifestations in the two countries. In Italy, despite the deep reluctance of the MSI’s party leadership, music was acknowledged as one of the means of cultural expression of the younger cohorts of MSI members (Tarchi 2010, Antonucci 2011). On the other side, in Germany, the evolution of the extreme right music scene was much more influenced by international variables, like the impact of English subculture (Dornbusch and Raabe 2004). It is particularly during this second phase that the variables dealing with the influence of music in the creation of new cultural collectivities display their crucial role. In Germany, these manifestations coincided with the influence of the skinhead movement in a prevailing international context. In Italy, the modifications to the party system that occurred in the early 1990s also influenced the extreme right. The transformation of the MSI into Alleanza Nazionale left space open

both for the restructuring of the party system on the extreme right, and for musical expression that started to show elements of internationalization, market orientation and influence by the skin culture that had been long developing in the German context.

The third difference has to do with the recent transformations of the populist radical right in the two countries. In Italy, the affirmation of the so-called Rock Identitario came as a reaction to a sclerotized scenario of the parties of the extreme right, particularly evident starting from the early 2000s. In Germany, cultural bridges are more visible than in the past between the political and cultural dimensions of the extreme right (Grabow 2016). Facilitating factors for a sort of “realignment” to comparable standards in both countries are elements related to the phenomenon of mainstreaming of the extreme right, as well as the growing impact of ideological hybridization and symbolic appropriation by extreme right music of cultural repertoires once unfamiliar to their political culture.

Despite these major differences, the analysis evidences the role of music within a broad repertoire of collective action (Della Porta, Caiani, Wagemann 2012) in the extreme right environment. The effects of music mobilization responded in the three outlined phases to differentiated needs of affirmation of the extreme right in its cultural expression. At the same time, the structuring of a stable and internationalized extreme music scene in the two countries opened up new opportunities for further development of the extreme right. These developments occurred within the extreme right at the organization level, and in its cultural expression. The impact of extreme right music is therefore evident in the ideological dimensions of communication, mobilization and recruitment. At the end of the 1990s, Marchi (1997, 336) raised a crucial methodological question regarding the necessary elements to define extreme right music actors. Should these elements emphasize stylistic or political components? The comparative analysis carried out in this paper demonstrates that an interplay of political and cultural variables has been adopted since the early development of extreme right music in Germany and Italy – although with different procedures – and it is still a winning formula for a political and cultural offering that combines political commitment, aesthetics and cultural belonging.

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